

It Is A Gift

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Summary:

After defeating Pennywise, each member of the Loser's Club has their own issues and demons to face before they'll ever start to feel normal again.

Richie helps to comfort them all, in his own special way.

But who will comfort Richie?

1. Stan + Bill

Author's Note:

This is just me wanting Richie to get some love hsfjfkfhs k thx Finn Wolfhard for fueling my feels for these characters ** Each chapter will be two Losers and the last chapter will be Richie centric. Thanks for reading!

It's been around two weeks since they defeated Pennywise, and slowly, the Loser's Club is tearing itself apart at the seams, their own nightmares haunting them long after It had been killed.

Stan's scars glint in the light whenever he turns to talk to Bill, and Richie can't help but stare. It's like the one physical reminder of what they went through being real. Stan notices, of course he does, and the next day Richie catches Stan in the boy's locker room with some makeup he took from his mom's purse, trying in vain to hide them.

Richie catches him by the wrist, feeling awful for making Stan feel self conscious about them, and when the Jewish boy shoots him an angry look, a defensive one, Richie does what he does best.

He talks.

"Ay, what's this all about, me lad? Cain't be hidin' yer battle scars behind makeup, eh, what what? Th' ladies, you'll 'ave 'em cryin' an' fallin' over th'mselves in th' 'allways, ye selfish, selfish man! C'mon, wipe eet off, m'lad, m'chum, my leetle Stanley Boy, or we'll be late fer class~!"

Stan can't help but break into a small laugh, flicking his nose.

"What the hell accent was that supposed to be?" He asks, but he obligingly begins to wipe off the concealer. Richie helps.

"Uhh....British/French/Irish, obviously. Educate yourself, Staniel, let's get you to class!"

Stan doesn't thank him, but the next day, he's makeup free.

Richie wakes himself up screaming that night.

He goes to school the next day and doesn't mention it to anyone.

The next one to be put back together was Bill. Sure, he played at being fine, whenever anyone asked, but Richie noticed how his stutter would suddenly intensify anytime somebody said the words 'sewer' or 'clown', or especially 'Georgie'.

He carried a yellow scrap of raincoat on Silver, tied tightly around the frame next to the seat.

Every time they went to go hang out, Bill would linger, eyes locked on that small scrap before he would finally hop on Silver and ride out with them.

Richie pulled him aside one day after he did it again, face drawn and serious for once. "Dude...you need to get rid of that raincoat."

Bill swung to face him, expression stricken and upset. "Ruh-Richie, I cuh-c-can't...! I-I c-can't juh-just fuh-forget about huh-him-!"

Richie shook his head, putting his hands on Bill's shoulders. "I'm not saying that at all. But dude? Dwelling on what happened, what that clown did to him...? You're not remembering him how he was. As your little brother. And that's not fair to Georgie."

It was the first time one of the Losers had dared mention his name to Bill.

"You don't want to forget about him, but he wouldn't want this for you, to always be thinking about him as he died. Right?"

Bill started to speak but his stutter was so strong he fell silent and simply nodded, face twisted in grief, before he collected himself and looked up at Richie.

"C-Can yuh-you c-come with m-me...?"

Richie nodded. "You got it, Big Bill."

That afternoon they untied the scrap and taped it to the top of a freshly waxed paper boat, before Bill, sobbing quietly, released it into the Kenduskeag.

Together, Richie and Bill watched it float away until it disappeared from sight.

Bill heaved in a quivering breath and wiped his tears away, giving Richie's shoulder a quick squeeze.

"Th-thanks. Thank you, Richie. I f-feel....better."

Richie grinned, shoving his glasses higher up his nose. "Don't worry about it. Now, what say we go kick everyone's ass at Street Fighter? I'll even let you play as Ryu."

Bill arched an eyebrow. "You're s-serious? You won't muh-make me play as Ken?"

Richie gave a small cackle. "You can have him for as long as you can keep him without losing."

Bill roles his eyes. "Guh-great, so I get to be Ryu for half a round. Puh-Perfect."

The two dissolved into laughter and went to rejoin their friends at the arcade.

Richie wakes up that night with a broken howl of fear, body shaking in terror and convinced he can smell gray water and cotton candy in his bedroom.

2. Mike + Ben

Summary for the Chapter:

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But who will comfort Richie?

Next is Mike.

Richie had noticed, along with the rest of the Loser's Club, that their homeschooled friend would go silent whenever they rode with him home, passing by the Bowers' farm.

The house looked sad and empty, broken beer bottles still scattered around the property and one window broken out.

Mike stared for a long time at the faded 'For Sale' sign.

"You guys go on ahead, I'll catch up." Richie urged the rest, Bill and Stan giving each other glances before they nodded, and the other Losers slowly disappeared down the hill.

Mike stared at the house, jumping slightly as Richie plopped his hand on his shoulder.

"Wanna burn it down?" Richie asked, only half joking. Mike flinched and shook his head quickly, and Richie inwardly hit himself for mentioning house fires so casually in front of him.

"I...I just. It's hard to handle, sometimes, y'know? I...Henry *hated* me, hated my family, just for being black. And his dad was the same way. Do you think...outside of Derry, the rest of the world, do you think they're like that, too...?"

Richie snorted loudly, causing Mike to turn to him, confused.

"Fuck 'em. If they do think like that, they're missing out, Mikey-My-Man."

Mike sighed wearily. "That's easy for you to say."

Richie shrugged, giving a small nod. "Yeah, you're right. I probably won't ever be able to understand, but...we don't think of you as anything other than our friend Mike. You could be black, white, Asian, Indian, orange, purple, blue-"

Mike gave a small chuckle as he tried to interrupt. "Richie-?"

The motormouth plowed on, unstoppable. "-turquoise, apricot, that nasty green color Mrs. Pittal painted her classroom last year, Communist, Muslim, hell, Stanny's a Jew and we still like him-"

Mike snickered again. "Richie!"

"What?"

"Thanks." Mike mumbled softly, but the trashmouth could tell that something was still bothering him.

"Mikey, speak up, señor, I can't hear you over all those unresolved issues you're bottling up." Richie said, only half teasing.

The taller boy sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. "I just...my mom. She always told me violence wasn't the answer, said that there would always be people like the Bowers, who thought like that, and if I fought them, it would only validate their negative opinions."

Richie nodded his head in an invitation to continue.

Mike, emboldened, continued on. "So...when you guys were in the well, and Henry came in...when I shoved him down that well...I felt like she would be disappointed. Look where they are now. Butch Bowers is dead and Henry's up at Juniper Hill with both of his legs shattered and a cracked femur. I didn't listen to her. I...I let her down..." A single tear dropped down his face and Mike swiped at it quickly to hide it.

Richie shook his head, riding closer to prod Mike in the side with his

finger. "No, you didn't, man. The way I see it, you did the best thing you could have for Henry."

Mike blinked, giving Richie a confused and watery look. "What do you mean?"

"His dad beat on him, we all knew it. Don't you think a lot of the racist shit Henry spewed was just things he picked up from Daddy Dearest? Hell, he was so desperate to get away from his dad he killed the fucker. If you hadn't shoved him down that well, he probably would have had to live in that house all alone and offed himself or something, at least until he got arrested. Jail woulda just made him more nuts. At least at Juniper Hill, they can help knock the crazy outta him, right?"

Mike was staring rather intently at his shoes, so Richie kept talking.

"It's okay to feel bad, Mike, but for what it's worth? I don't think your mom would be ashamed of you for keeping yourself alive. You were her only kid, right? That makes you her baby, and heaven help the bastard that messes with a momma's baby."

Mike gave a soft laugh at that, giving Richie a grin. "That's funny, man. My mom used to say stuff like that all the time. Thanks."

Richie made finger guns at Mike and spun his bike around to head towards Stan's house, the next Loser to be dropped off. "No problemo, Mike. Gotta keep our MVP in primo condition, right? Later skater."

This time Richie doesn't scream at all when the nightmares scare him awake, just clamping his teeth tightly over a pillow to muffle his sobs as he cries himself into a restless sleep.

It didn't take much for the resident trashmouth to notice Ben was now terrified of the local library.

It used to be his sanctuary, the one place he could hide from both Bowers' gang and the crippling loneliness of having no friends in an unfamiliar town.

The fact that It had ruined that for him pissed Richie off.

"Psst. Hey, Ben. Benjamin! Benny Boy!" He hissed as he poked the larger boy in the shoulder with the soft end of his pencil at the end of class.

"Richie..? What is it?" He asked softly, courteous of the teacher who was still finishing up her lecture.

"Hey, man, you're smart, you understand this geometry crap, right? Can you help me with the assignment after school?" He hissed, gesturing to his notebook.

Ben blinked and gave a small, shy smile. It kind of made Richie think nobody had ever called Ben smart before, and that pissed him off, too.

"Sure, I can help, but my cousin...he got cut from the football team last week, he's been awful lately, I don't think my house would be the best..." He looked apologetic and Richie shook his head.

"That's okay, but my mom's probably drunk as a skunk on the couch and she'll kick my ass if we wake her up. Hey..." Richie smirked, his grin deceptively casual. "Wanna go to the library...?"

Ben flinched.

"U-Um. The school library?" He asked hopefully, the ringing bell signaling the end of class.

Richie shook his head, gathering up his books. "ERRRT, wrong guess, shall we show him what's behind door number one?" He crowed, tugging his local library card out of his book bag and waving it in the air like a lighter at a concert.

Ben looked terrified but he nodded slowly, his loyalty to helping his friend overpowering his fear. "O...Okay. Y-yeah, that's fine, that's great, uh. Yeah. Perfect."

Within the hour, the two of them are outside the Derry library, Ben looking at the large building as if he was approaching his own execution.

Richie opened the door with his foot and pranced inside, ignoring the glare from the librarian. "C'mon, Benny, let's go, we've got learning to do!"

Ben slunk after Richie, body language obviously uncomfortable. Richie claimed the largest table, flopping his bag on it and putting his feet up on the neighboring chair. Ben sat his things down gently, unpacking and glancing around the room somewhat nervously.

"Gotta love the good ole library, huh, Bennikins? All that book learnin' and shit." He asked, earning a loud 'shh!' from a neighboring table. Richie grinned and flipped them off, turning back to Ben.

He was sweating nervously but nodded anyways. "Y-Yeah, I love the library, it's just. Um. After I saw...It, here, I haven't felt...safe here, anymore. There were egg splatters on the floor, for awhile, but...they're gone now...I just don't like to think about it..." He confided softly, looking ashamed of himself.

Richie just grinned and unzipped his backpack. "Uh, oh, Benji, we might have a problem then, because I brought a snickety-snack, some good ole brain food." He tugged out a carton of hard boiled eggs, already peeled, and ignored the widening of Ben's eyes as he began to juggle three at once.

"Richie, you're gonna get in trouble!" Ben warned, but he couldn't help but snicker quietly at the look of concentration on his friend's face.

"Trouble, schmouble. I'm a growing boy, I gotta eat." He shot back, before tossing one up high and catching it in his mouth. He whooped at the catch, spraying little egg bits all over the table.

Ben's face was red from laughter, trying not to make a lot of noise as he covered his mouth. "Richie, oh my God, you're so weird-!"

Richie did it again, munching on the egg and cackling at the mess he was making. "There might be a different kind of egg stain in this library after this, know what I'm sayin'?"

They both get kicked out, but they make plans to sneak back in and

finish Richie's homework the following day. Ben grinned happily to himself the entire way home. The memory of the headless boy chasing him and dropping eggs all over the floor would forever be overshadowed by Richie hacking hard boiled eggs all over the place while the librarian chased him out the door with a broom.

Richie doesn't even try to sleep this time, staring intently at his closet door and shaking as he waited for his nightmares to take him by force. Downstairs, he can hear his parents fighting and it only enhances his terror as he prays neither of them will come upstairs.

3. Beverly + Eddie

Summary for the Chapter:

After defeating Pennywise, each member of the Loser's Club has their own issues and demons to face before they'll ever start to feel normal again.

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But who will comfort Richie?

"I wanna sell the house." Beverly said softly as the Losers sat outside in the Barrens, sprawled in different positions.

Richie looked up from his intense focus on making a sandcastle shaped like a penis and frowned at her. "What for? Your douchebag dad's in jail, it's yours once you turn eighteen."

Bev shook her head and to everyone's horror, her eyes had filled with tears. "It's not my house. It'll never be my house, not after everything he did to me there."

After they had defeated It, Bev bucked up her courage and called her aunt, who promptly reported Alvin Marsh for child abuse and sexual abuse of a minor. He would serve a minimum of thirty years in prison for it. Ben's aunt had packed up and moved to Derry, and all the Losers had helped Beverly box up her belongings and move to the new house. Now her old house sat, locked up and unused on the corner, waiting for Bev to turn 18 to decide what to do with it. The only thing legally she could do with it now was have her aunt sell it.

Ben and Bill had swooped to her side to comfort her, but Richie had another idea.

"Bullshit, it's not yours."

The Losers looked up at him in various states of confusion, and Richie grinned wickedly in response.

"You still got the keys, right? Well...let's make it your house. Let's make some good memories there and drive that fucker out of it for good."

Bev stared at him as a smile slowly crept onto her features.

"Richie, you're a genius."

Stan made a dramatic show of covering her mouth. "Shhh-! Don't say that, we'll never hear the end of it!"

All the Losers pitched in, in their own way.

Stan snuck over a smorgasbord of snacks, packets of crackers and bags of chips, dips, meats, the whole nine yards. It probably cost him most of that month's allowance to buy all that stuff.

Ben got a projector from the library, and together with Bill's help, they bribed the Aladdin's owner into loaning them four of Beverly's favorite movies.

Richie brought his record player and speakers; Ben and Mike pooled their record collections so there would be tons of music for them to dance to all night.

Bill snuck over as much beer as his parents would reasonably not miss, and Richie managed to get three bottles of vodka from his own house, alone with some different juices to mix it all with.

Mike and Eddie snuck into the high school's technology room and came up with a disco ball and several colorful lights that would help make the whole house glow.

The party was legendary, and would go down in Loser's Club history as being the most fun any of them had had since the whole It event. As they all eventually packed up and headed home, Bev pulled Richie aside on the front porch and planted a hard kiss on his cheek.

"Thank you, Richie. That was a great idea. I had so much fun."

Richie grinned cheekily. "Aw, c'mon, Bevvie, I think I deserve a little more than a kiss on the cheek~"

She laughed, reaching into her pocket and passing him a small baggie with a soft green substance inside. Richie waggled his eyebrows and slipped it into his own pocket, a large grin on his face.

"Yas, ma'am, oh Lawdy Lawd that'll work for me, yessiree!"

"Get outta here, Trashmouth." She teased, giving him a light shove.

Richie laughed as he stumbled, before mounting his bike. "You want me to ride with you back to your aunt's house?" He asked.

Bev took a drag from her cigarette and smiled. "Nah, that's okay. I think I'll stay here tonight. After all," she turned and headed for the front door to go back inside, "It's my house."

Richie doesn't mean to fall asleep, but three days without so much as a wink is a long time for anyone, especially a teenager. The nightmare sneaks up on him, and he wakes with a shriek, diving under the covers and shaking like a leaf. He sobs into his hands, hearing angry footsteps pounding up the stairs.

"Shut the fuck up, Richie, you whiny little bitch! God, why couldn't you have been born a girl!? A girl would know how to shut up and be quiet! I need a fucking drink." His mom's voice snaps angrily outside the door. After a moment her footsteps walk away, followed shortly by the car squealing out of the driveway.

Richie screams into his hands, no longer caring to muffle himself.

After all, nobody is around to hear him.

Eddie is the last because he's the one who arguably has the most twisted issues since Neibolt.

Sure, they all had their share of problems and demons to face, but when your mom had spent your entire life hammering into you that you were sick, weak, and fragile, and forcefully cut you off from the only people who could understand what you were going through? It couldn't be easy.

Richie and the rest of the Losers knew all about Eddie's rebellion to his mother, knew how he had thrown his pills at her and run away from home, run straight to Neibolt to help them kill It. Knew that since then, Eddie's mom had been even more smothering.

Even though the curfew had been lifted once Henry Bowers had been taken to Juniper Hill, she still insisted that Eddie be home no later than 5pm. The one time the Losers had been late, Sonia Kaspbrak had been waiting on the porch with murder in her eyes, yanking Eddie away from them by his wrist and hissing at them that if they were ever late again, she would pull Eddie out of school so he would be away from *'monstrous little brats'* like them, *'putting all sorts of horrible ideas in my Eddie-bear's head!'*

Eddie tried to speak up in their defense, clearly upset with her, but she plowed over him, as usual. She ushered him inside and shot the rest of the Losers a murderous glare, before following after.

There was the sound of several locks clicking into place and then nothing.

Since then, it only seemed to get worse. The next night they had him on his front porch by 4:45, and Sonia had still been waiting, clearly upset that they had been on time.

"Cutting it a little close, weren't you, Eddie? Come on, inside, now, before your allergies start acting up."

It was borderline ridiculous.

One day, due to previous obligations to family, the rest of the Losers were absent, just Richie and Eddie slowly biking back towards Eddie's house.

"I hate her." Eddie spoke softly, out of nowhere, but his voice held conviction.

Richie blinked, glancing over at his shorter friend. "Who, your mom?"

"No, Beverly! Of course, my mom!" Eddie snapped, and to Richie's dismay, there were tears pooling at the corners of his shorter friend's eyes. "She's just so....God, I just, I can't even breathe when I'm with

her!"

It was truer than he realized, due to his 'asthma' being psychosomatic. It made sense that the person who caused it would trigger asthmatic spells.

Richie desperately wanted to make a joke, do a Voice, say something to relieve the tension and make Eddie laugh, to cheer him up, but he knew Eddie needed to say these things. Needed to say what was on his mind, without somebody telling him what he thought was wrong.

"I....I went to the doctor yesterday."

Richie glanced over, confusion evident in his features as he hopped off his bike and pushed it along, slowing down their trip. It was only 3:15, they had plenty of time to get him home. Eddie did as well, still struggling with his words.

"That's why you couldn't hang out yesterday?" Richie asked, prompting him to continue. Eddie nodded sharply. "But...we biked by your house, your mom was home all day."

Eddie grit his teeth. "Yep."

And, oh.

"You went by yourself?" Richie asked, eyes wide. "Dude, that's like a six mile bike ride from your house!"

Eddie's mouth snapped shut, looking furious. "I'm not a fucking baby, I made it just f-"

Richie cut him off quickly, not wanting him to get the wrong idea. "No, wait a sec, Spaghetti Man. I know you can handle it, it just surprised me that you actually wanted to go to the doctor. Why didn't you just ask your mom to take you, if you were sick...?"

Eddie halted, hands tending tightly around the handlebars. "That's the problem, Richie. I'm *not* sick. Not at all. Not...not *physically*."

Richie blinked, not understanding, but noticing the very telling testament that Eddie was seriously upset. He hadn't even bothered

telling Richie not to call him Spaghetti Man.

"What are you saying, Eds?"

The shorter boy spun around, and yep, there they were. The tears were flowing in full force. "I'm saying, they told me I don't have asthma. I'm not sickly, I'm not ill, I don't have any sort of autoimmune disorder or anything! She *lied*! All my life, she's been lying to me! I-I've spent so much time w-worrying about being sick, about getting sick, I-I've carried around this stupid *fucking*-" He paused to tear his fanny pack from his body, flinging it down an open drain in the gutter, letting his bike hit the street as he angrily stomped the fanny pack down until it disappeared into the drain with a distant splash.

"There, you fucking clown, you want it? Take that too, you've already got everything fucking else; Stan's pride, Bill's brother, my fucking *sanity*, might as well have that too! Fuck *you*, fuh...uh...uhhh-!" He cut himself off, gasping for air frantically. Richie cursed and dumped his bike, scrambling over to Eddie and gripping his shoulders.

"Eds, hey! *Eddie*! Your inhaler, damn it, where's your..." He trailed off in disbelief as he looked down at the drain. "D-Did you just fucking ditch your inhaler!?"

Eddie wheezed and gasped, hands on his knees as he crouched over. "D...Doooohn't....n-neeeeed...iiii-it...!" His face was turning red. Richie swore again, reaching out and lifting Eddie's face to meet his eyes. His heart leapt in fear for his friend.

"Dude, dude, stay calm, just breathe, okay? You're fine, you're okay, you're right, you don't need it, don't need that shit, you're not sick, you're fine, you're healthy healthy *healthy*-" Richie spoke in a low tone, trying to remain calm even though he was half tempted to squirm down the drain to try and fish the fanny pack out himself.

Eddie's tears ran down his face, still wheezing heavily. It was like no matter how much air he took in, it wasn't getting to him, wasn't enough. "Sh-sheee *l-liiiiied* t-to meee...!" He cried softly, Richie hating Sonia Kaspbrak even more with each word.

"Yes, she did." Richie agreed finally, making Eddie look at him. "But now you *know that*. You didn't before so you fell for it, but you know better now! It's all in your head, Spaghetti Man, you have to fight it! Just breathe with me, okay? In..." he took a long, dramatic breath, watching as Eddie struggled to do the same. "...and out. In....and out. In....out. You good? Come on, let's do it again. In...out..."

Eddie's face gradually lost its red tint as they kept breathing together, the smaller boy slowly releasing the death grip he had on Richie's arms, the trashmouth's hands leaving his face. "I....I'm not *sick*, why is this *still happening to me!*" he begged weakly.

Richie shook his head. "I...I think...well, think about it, you've thought that you had that asthma shit your whole life. So even though your brain knows it's all bullshit, your body doesn't yet. You'll get over it, you just gotta give yourself some time, okay Eds? Gotta be gentle with yourself, alright? We're all a little fucked up, you're not alone."

Eddie looked up at him somewhat desperately, giving a short, stiff nod. "Th...that makes...sense. I...okay, Richie, I can...I can try."

Richie nodded, standing up and giving a small grin, slapping Eddie on the back. "Jesus, Eds, you sure know how to show a gal a good time. Next time you decide to kill yourself, don't do it in front of me, kapiche? As your best friend I'm contractually obligated to save your ass, you get me?"

Eddie smiled weakly, wiping tears away and standing up, taking a deep breath. It went in with no problem. "Th...thank you, Richie. Thanks for being my friend, you giant smartass."

Richie grinned cheekily, picking his bike back up. "Hey, better a smartass than a dumbass, am I right, Eddie Spaghetti? Just remember, if she ever gets to be too much for ya, come to my place. That'll give me and her some privacy, yeah? Heh heh."

Eddie rolled his eyes as he slowly picked up his own bike and began to pedal towards his house. "I'll keep that in mind. Oh, and Richie?"

"Yes, my eventual son-in-law?"

"Don't call me Eddie Spaghetti."

Richie was sitting up in his bed, the nightstand light clicked on. He was staring mindlessly at some comic books and doing his best to not fall asleep, knowing that watching Eddie gasp and wheeze today would only make the nightmares about getting to him in the well house too late come back full force.

He rubbed his tired eyes, the dark bags underneath bruised and swollen, before tugging off his oversized glasses and setting them on the nightstand. He must have been more tired than he thought, because his hand misjudged the distance and his glasses slid into the gap between the nightstand and the bed.

"Damn it." He grumbled softly, letting the comic flop to the side and squirming out from under the nest of covers he had made over the past few weeks. Richie squinted, the dimly lit bedroom becoming a blur of different colors as he reached under the bed, feeling for the familiar frames of his glasses.

With his arm stuck almost all the way under the bed, Richie felt his fingertips brush cool plastic, his pinky snagging the nosepiece of the glasses as he went to pull them out.

A gloved hand clamped tightly around his wrist, and Richie found himself staring directly into the cold yellow eyes of It.

"Time to float, Richie!"

Richie screamed.

4. Richie

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After defeating Pennywise, each member of the Loser's Club has their own issues and demons to face before they'll ever start to feel normal again.

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But who will comfort Richie?

Eddie scowled as his mother finished screwing a large deadbolt lock over the front door, giving it a self satisfied smile as she finished.

"Perfect, now I know you'll be safe at home."

That wasn't why she installed it and they both knew it.

"Mom..." Eddie began, crossing his arms over his chest and unsure of how to word what he was about to say. "I'm going to go spend the night at Richie's tonight, remember...?"

Her face darkened. "Eddie-bear, you're not going. You have to stay home, where you'll be safe, okay? Now, go up to bed and wait for Mommy, she'll be right there to tuck you in."

Eddie's scowl increased but he nodded, trying to make himself look smaller. "Can you bring an extra blanket up? It's been kind of chilly upstairs..."

Sonia's face lit up and she smiled. "Good idea, Eddie, honey. I'll run down to the linen closet and fetch it. I wouldn't want you to get sick."

Eddie smiled but it didn't reach his eyes. "Me either, Mom." He turned and headed up the stairs to his bedroom, hearing Sonia call up after him.

"Oh, and Eddie? The pharmacist said he can replace all of your medications and your inhaler, so don't go dropping them again,

alright? I've already ordered you another fanny pack."

"Thanks, Mommy." he said weakly, closing the door behind him and locking it. This was getting ridiculous, he needed to get out of here...

Eddie's eyes landed on the window, where Richie always climbed in. Maybe....he could climb down? But he would have to be quiet and careful, if his mother came upstairs and saw him sliding off the roof she'd probably chain him to his bed for the rest of his life.

Eddie threw on a jacket and lifted the window, gulping at the sight of the roof. Shingles sticking up at odd angles, and of course the drop off. He scooted himself out carefully, cringing as he remembered sometimes Richie would just jump into the bushes or slide down the drainpipe.

I swear that kid has no sense of self preservation at all! He thought, using the tree closest to the house as a ladder to scurry down. Once he hit the ground, unharmed, Eddie picked up his bike and began to pedal towards the Tozier's house. Richie had said that he could come over anytime she was too much...

All too soon, he was there, letting his bike drop on the front lawn next to Richie's own. Only then did he realize what time it was, biting his lip. It was nearly eleven o'clock at night, Richie could be asleep...

Instead of knocking, Eddie peered in through a window and saw an empty couch, blankets strewn haphazardly over it. Maggie Tozier was already out drinking, then, and judging by the missing truck in the driveway, Wentworth hadn't gotten off work yet.

So then why was the front door slightly ajar? Had Maggie simply left it unlatched? Or was something else going on...?

Eddie gulped and stepped inside, making sure the door was properly latched behind him. "Hello? Richie? Are you home?"

He heard a muffled shriek from upstairs and his heart plummeted in his chest. That was *Richie's voice!*

Eddie thundered up the stairs, taking them two at a time and inwardly cursing his short legs.

'Now who's got no self preservation instinct?' He thought wildly, throwing Richie's bedroom door open.

Eddie's lanky friend was on the floor beside his bed, hopelessly tangled in the sheets and thrashing wildly. He screamed again, and Eddie's eyes widened as he realized that somehow, Richie was still asleep.

"St-Stop it! Let go, let *GO!*"

Eddie quickly darted to his side, shaking Richie by the shoulders. "H-Hey! Richie! Rich, wake up! Wake up!" His cries seemed to have no effect, the dark haired boy remained trapped in whatever nightmare he was in. It sounded hellish.

"N-No! Stop, don't touch me-!" Richie howled, curling away and flailing, before a stray fist caught Eddie in the face.

He swore as he was knocked back, rubbing his jaw and scooting back over to pin Richie's arms down, but that only seemed to make it worse. The taller boy was alive under him, jerking and bucking to try and get Eddie off of him.

He needed to wake him up, somehow.

"Sorry, Richie..." Eddie apologized, cringing as he slapped Richie across the face. Brown eyes snapped open in an instant as Richie shot upright, causing their foreheads to collide.

"Jesus *fuck!*" Richie swore, rubbing his head irritably. He did a double take as he seemed to realize where he was, and who was there, even as Eddie grumbled curses and scowled at him for the headbutt. "Whoa, there, Eddie Spaghetti! What brings you to mi casa on this foine, foine eve'nin'?" He asked, falling into a Voice just as easily as breathing. He blinked as he caught sight of the blood dripping from Eddie's split lip and sobered up instantly. "Dude, what the fuck happened to you?"

Eddie sighed and wiped his lip against his forearm. "Um. You did, actually. You were having a nightmare."

Richie's eyes widened and then narrowed. "You musta been the one

dreaming, Eds, I don't have nightmares."

Eddie huffed. "Tell that to my fucking face, dude, you broke it! Why didn't you ever say anything..? You know we all have bad dreams, it's nothing to be ashamed of."

The taller boy looked like he was about to protest, but a glare from Eddie caused him to relax. "I...fine, yes, I have stupid nightmares, it's not a big deal, I'm handling it, are we done?"

Eddie's eyes widened as he got to his feet, grabbing Richie's wrists and tugging him up as well with some effort. "Handling it? How exactly are you handling it?" His eyes drifted to the comic books on the bed, the empty bottles of vodka leaning against the closet door, and a small tube of concealer. His brown eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"Richie...how much sleep have you been getting a night..?"

Richie blinked and gave a shaky grin. "Oh, I get my eight hours in, after I'm done fucking your mom of cour-"

Eddie's lips pressed into a thin line and Richie caved.

"Um. I haven't slept a full night since. Uh. Since It, happened."

The smaller boy's eyes widened. "Wh-Richie! That was over two weeks ago!"

"Yeah."

Eddie picked up an empty booze bottle and glanced over at Richie. "You've been drinking yourself into oblivion?"

Richie bit his lip, looking away. "If I drink it fast enough, I pass out, and then there are no dreams at all..."

The hypochondriac bit his lip, feeling awful for not noticing Richie's struggle. He picked up the tube of concealer and squinted at it. "And the makeup?"

Richie rubbed the back of his neck, embarrassed. "Stan noticed the bags under my eyes. So I swiped some of this shit from Bev's makeup

bag."

"Dude!"

"She didn't even notice!" Richie defended himself weakly. "And it was already almost gone, it's not like I took a full tube!"

Eddie sighed heavily and sat down on the bed next to Richie. "You have to get some sleep, Rich, you're going to make yourself sick!"

Richie buried his head in his hands, fists tangling in the dark wavy locks. "I can't, man. I just can't. I see...horrible shit. Awful things. I see you getting killed in the well house. Bill getting his head ripped off by It. That creepy fucking painting girl chewing Stan's face off. Bev's dad hurting her, Ben getting sliced open. Mike getting killed by Bowers. It just... doesn't... *stop!*" To Eddie's amazement, he could spot tears welling in the typically jovial teen's eyes. Richie reached up to cover his eyes but Eddie grabbed his wrist.

"Hey, hey, no, c'mon, dude, it's okay to cry. You don't have to hide from me, or any of the Losers, okay? We love you. You don't always have to be the strong one. You're allowed to be scared too, okay?"

Richie's hand was shaking in Eddie's grasp, letting his tears roll down his cheeks. "B-But...you guys... you all had it so much worse than me..."

Eddie released Richie's wrist but grabbed his hand in a tight squeeze. "Uh-uh. We aren't doing that. There's no 'worse', okay? We all have our traumas, and everyone reacts to trauma differently. You're allowed to take as much time as you need to recover, dude, nobody expects you to just get over it."

Richie stared at him, at a loss for words. Eddie reached for the telephone on the nightstand, tilting his head to hold the receiver as he dialed with one hand.

"Wh-whoa, Eds, wait, what are you doing?"

"Just listen." He said, holding the phone between them.

It rang twice, and then suddenly, it picked up.

"Hello...?" a tired female voice asked sleepily. Eddie nodded at Richie, nudging him slightly.

"B...Bev?" Richie whispered softly.

"Richie? Are you alright? What's going on?" Bev asked frantically as her voice lost its sleepy tone. *"Did something happen? Want me to come over? I can, if you want."*

Richie blinked in amazement, looking over at Eddie, who merely smiled. "Y...Yeah. Could you? I...I don't want to be alone right now."

"I'll be there as soon as I can."

Eddie took the phone and hung it up, before dialing another number.

"Whossit...?" Ben asked sleepily.

Richie bit his lip and spoke. "H-Haystack. Sorry to wake you up, I just..."

"Richie, is something wrong? You sound scared, can I help?"

Richie gave a small noise of relief. "C-Can you come over?"

"Yeah, man, I'll head over now. Leave the door unlocked."

Richie looked in amazement at the phone, Eddie dialing Mike's number next.

"Hanlon residence."

This time Richie wasn't too afraid to speak. "Mike...? Hey, Mike, sorry to wake you up, I just. I needed to talk to someone."

"Is this about...It?"

Richie fiddled with the phone's cord. "Y-Yeah..."

"Don't worry about it, I don't mind. You can call me whenever. You know, what you said to me before...it helped. I owe you one for that."

Richie gave another small sob, one of disbelief. He had helped Mike?

His rambling and annoying jokes had...helped?

"Please come over."

"You got it. See you in ten."

Eddie went to take the phone out of Richie's hands, but he clung onto it tightly, not letting go. "L...Let me? I..I need to do this."

Eddie blinked and gave him a brilliant smile. "No problem, Richie."

This time, Richie dialed. Bill's number hadn't changed for years, and he knew it by heart.

"H'llo..."

"Bill? Hey, Bill, it's, uh. It's Richie."

"...oh. Hi, Richie." Bill stated dreamily. *"It's luh-late, man. Y'okay?"*

"Um. I...uh..."

"Richie...? I'll t-take that as a no. Do you nuh-need me to swing over? It's no buh-big deal. I'm y-your friend; that's what f-friends do."

"Yes, please." Richie said in a small voice, clinging tightly to the phone.

"Hey, uh. I juh-just saw Bev and Buh-Ben riding their bikes puh-past my house. I bet if I asked they'd c-come, too?"

Richie swallowed, giving a faint smile. "They, ah. They're already on their way to my place."

"Of course th-they are, we're the Luh-Loser's Club. We h-help each other. See you in a b-bit, Rich."

Richie wiped his tears away and gave Eddie an appreciative smile. He couldn't believe that his friends were willing to get up in the middle of the night just to come and comfort him after a nightmare.

He dialed the final number.

"Grandma, I told you, it's like midnight here, we're not on Italy time." Stan mumbled into the phone.

"Grandma? That's a pretty kinky nickname for me, isn't it, Stan?"

Stan sighed heavily. *"Richie, whyyyy? It's not summer vacation anymore, we have school tomorrow."* He whined softly, his voice muffled as though he had flopped face first into his bed.

Eddie gave Richie a wink and he grinned in response.

"Hey, Loser, emergency snuggle session at my place in ten minutes. Be there or be square."

Stan sighed into the phone, and Richie half expected him to hang up, before he spoke again. *"Kay, I'll be there, but only because your bed is comfier than mine. Also I'm stealing your pillow."*

Richie grinned. "You're one in a million, Stan the Man."

To his surprise, Stan actually laughed. *"And don't you forget it! Want me to stop by Eddie's place and pick him up?"*

Eddie stuck his mouth close to the receiver. "Too late, I'm already here. Everyone else is already on their way."

"Aw, man, and I live the furthest away! Next time, call me first, okay?"

Richie blinked in surprise, his hand tight around the phone. "Next time...?"

"Yeah, I mean, we all get spooked after dealing with...with It. I'm surprised you didn't call sooner. Quit trying to be so macho all the time, okay Trashmouth?"

Eddie took the phone away and hung it up on the receiver, Richie blinking in surprise. "Th...They're really all coming. Just for me?"

Eddie smiled. "I told you, man. You don't have to do this alone. We've got your back."

And as the rest of the Loser's Club trickled inside, Richie began to

believe him.

"So what's going on?" Ben asked curiously, blinking at the sight before the group. Richie was bundled up in a cocoon of blankets, while Eddie went around the room picking up empty liquor bottles and dropping them into a garbage bag.

The smaller boy set the bag aside. "Captain Oblivious over there-" he gestured to Richie, who grinned impishly, "-seems to think that he's not allowed to be affected by what happened. And also he hasn't had a full night's sleep since we fought the damn clown."

Five pairs of jaws dropped.

"B-But, Richie...! Why didn't you say anything?" Beverly asked, settling onto the bed beside him and fiddling with the blankets.

"Didn't wanna be a bother." Richie mumbled, rubbing the back of his head.

"A *buh-bother*?!" Bill exclaimed. "Nuh-no way!"

"You're never a bother, Richie, you're our friend." Mike said firmly, concern for his friend evident on his features.

"Alright, scoot your non-bothersome butt over." Stan announced, plopping down next to Richie and making himself comfy. At his confused look, he elaborated. "We already know It can't hurt us when we're together. Good luck having nightmares with us all around."

Richie swallowed the lump in his throat as his six best friends made a place for themselves on the bed, throwing blankets and pillows at each other until they all were comfortable. Richie was surrounded on every side by a warm body, breathing in the scent of Beverly's shampoo and Ben's body wash; he could feel Bill's soft auburn hair tickling his legs as he curled up at the foot of the bed; he could hear Mike and Stan's quiet conversation as Eddie reached over him and clicked the lamp off.

He felt so *loved*.

Richie slept, and did not dream of clowns, paper boats, or house fires. He didn't dream of headless boys, distorted paintings, abusive fathers, or even lepers.

He dreamt of his friends, the best he'd ever had.

They may have been a bunch of Losers, but they made him feel loved anyway.

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks to everyone for all the comments and views, your support means the world to me! ;) Hopefully Richie gets enough love for you guys, especially with everything I put him through, poor guy.